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MYSTERY STILL AFTER 20 YRS.

# The Enigma of Pearl Harbor

By GEORGE ROBOI.

December 7, 1941!

Who can ever forget that "Day of Infamy"?

Even today, 20 years later, when a war long-fought and won separates us from Pearl Harbor Day and a new war beckons, people can tell you where they were, who told them the news, what they did. Like a nightmare, indelibly branded on the mind, it won't be forgotten.

The writer of this article on that tragic Sunday was in his office on the sixth floor of the Mirror building, staring at the news of the Pacific.

Recent news hadn't been good. For years, diplomats in Washington and Tokyo had fenced warily to avoid an open break between the U. S. and Japan, the latter standing under a trade and economic embargo imposed by President Roosevelt.

Japanese transports and warships had been observed steaming through the South China Sea. Were they headed toward the Dutch East Indies, where the Japanese warlords hoped to find the oil and gasoline denied them by the U. S.? Or were they headed toward British Malaya, with its vast mineral wealth, and Singapore, Britain's Far Eastern bastion? Only the day before, on Dec. 6, Roosevelt had sent a personal message to Emperor Hirohito, begging him for the sake of humanity to stay the hand of the Japanese warlords.

But who dreamed the Japanese, with all their power and a shaky economic foundation and bogged down in an endless war in China, would be foolish enough to attack the U. S. with its great Pacific fleet? What the Japanese wanted, the reports said, was the wealth of Britain's empire in the Far

East and the oil of the East Indies.

SO THE WRITER of this piece, using the information available on that tragic day, began to write what he considered a penetrating analysis of the situation. Two hours later he started for the Mirror composing room to drop off his copy. Passing through the city room, he was jostled by an office boy. Too excited to speak, the boy thrust before him a slip of paper which he had just torn from the teletype machine. It read:

**"FLASH... WHITE HOUSE SAYS JAPS ATTACK PEARL HARBOR."**

The time: 2:22 p.m. EST.

The writer quickly got up his story. Its title: "How We Can Beat Japs Without War."

MILLIONS of Americans learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor while listening to the broadcast of the Dodgers-Clarets football game at the Polo Grounds. Ward Cuff had just returned a Brooklyn kickoff to his

27-yard line when Paul Boston WOR interrupted with the first flash at 2:23 p.m.

County officers learned at 3:16 p.m. when turning in to the N. Y. Philharmonic concert at Carnegie Hall. Arthur Rodzinski's musicians were about to start Shostakovich's First Symphony when the Columbia Broadcasting System repeated an earlier bulletin.

**THEN, RED BALL** insignia flashing in the sun, the first Japanese dive bombers hit Pearl Harbor at 7:55 a.m. (1:55 p.m. EST). Followed by wave upon wave of planes from the six aircraft carriers in Admiral Nagumo's striking force, which had sailed from a secret base in the Kuriles on Nov. 26, they turned America's Gibraltar of the Pacific into an inferno of exploding, sinking ships under a pall of greasy smoke from flaming fuel tanks and ruptured powder magazines.

The sailors aboard the ships in battle-ship row fought back heroically. It had been weekend as usual in Hawaii, and fully half the crews and a third of the officers were ashore on pass. Those who remained broke open locked ammunition chests, ran to the guns, even fired 45's when they had no other weapons.

The Navy and Marines were unable to get a plane into the air. The Army managed to get only a dozen planes off the runways at Wheeler Field, its main base on the island. Only two of our planes were able to take off from the other Army base at Bellows, and both were shot down.

**THEN, at 8:15 a.m.** as suddenly as they had come, the Japanese broke off the attack and returned to their carriers. Left behind was the wreckage of our Pacific fleet.

Of the eight battleships, which less than two hours before had ridden so proudly at their moorings, four were sunk or capsized, the other four were aflame.

The Arizona and Oklahoma were complete wrecks. The California, West Virginia and Nevada were so badly battered it took six months to get the least damaged seaworthy again. Three cruisers, three destroyers and four auxiliary craft were also afire.

Lost also were 183 Army and Navy planes, smashed to bits on the ground as well as vital repair sheds, hangars, fuel and ammunition dumps.

Killed in the 110 minutes of furious combat were 2,403 Americans, among them 2,088 sailors.

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